

Who dun it?

If you watch CSI, Crime Scene Investigation, or read books like Jefferey Deaver's murder mysteries there is a focus on forensic evidence. The Scene of Crime Officers look for trace: finger prints, blood, small bits of fabric, soil from a shoe, etc.

In the lab they analyse this trace. They may use a gas chromatogram spectrometer for analysing the chemistry of trace they find. They look for small bits of evidence that will positively link suspect to the crime so they can prove 'who dun it.'

1. God's finger prints

We have been following the life of Joseph. His brothers sold him into slavery in Egypt. He was falsely accused of rape and thrown into prison. In Chapter 40 in prison he meets two of Pharaoh's officials, his baker and chief cup bearer. They have dreams which Joseph interprets.

It turns out as Joseph has interpreted, the baker is hanged but the cup bearer goes back to serve Pharaoh. A cup bearer is a very important trusted position. He had to serve Pharaoh his wine making sure it is not poisoned. So he was often with Pharaoh at table. Joseph sees this as a chance to get out of prison. He asks the cup bearer to tell Pharaoh about his case. The cup bearer goes back to Pharaoh but forgets Joseph.

We can see the bad things that have happened to Joseph, what brothers did, what Potiphar's wife did, and how the cup bearer forgot him but the events of Joseph's life have God's finger prints all over them. We don't need a CSI team or a gas chromatogram spectrometer to show that God is behind all that is happening. It is clear that God is the master mind behind these events.

- Joseph's dreams are given by God and point forward to his future when his family do bow down before him.
- His brother's hatred and actions get him to Egypt.
- The fact that the Ishmaelite traders just happen to be passing is no coincidence.
- Potiphar's wife's actions get him to prison
- Where he happens to meet Pharaoh's baker & cup bearer
- God gives Joseph the ability to interpret their dreams
- Pharaoh's dreams are obviously God given
- The cup bearer remembers Joseph at just the right time.
- God gives Joseph the ability to interpret them.
- The seven good and seven bad years happen as God has planned
- It all leads to Joseph's family being saved from famine.

We see that God is sovereign over the events of history and even over the evil actions of people. While God isn't the cause of evil he uses it for his purposes.

In the NT we see the same things with Jesus. The evil actions of Judas, the Sanhedrin, the crowd and Pilate - through all this God is working his great plan to save us through Jesus death.

2. Tell 'im 'e's dreamin'

In the film *The Castle* the father often says, "Tell 'im 'e's dreamin.'" The son is buying things from the Trading Post but the father says they are asking far too much. "He's dreamin'" means he's lost touch with reality.

Well Pharaoh is dreaming but he is aware that this is very much reality. This is a message from God.

First the narrator tells us what the dreams were and then Pharaoh tells us in his own words what he saw (41:17ff). When he tells it we see how worried he is. He emphasises how bad the seven scrawny, ugly cows were. *"I had never seen such ugly cows in all the land of Egypt."*²⁰ *The lean, ugly cows ate up the seven fat cows that came up first.*²¹ *But even after they ate them, no one could tell that they had done so; they looked just as ugly as before."* (41:19-21)

The scrawny cows cannibalised the fat cows but didn't get any fatter themselves. This a portent of some really evil disaster - but what? His anxiety is heightened by the fact that his magicians can't interpret the dreams. This is a failure of their gods to give the meaning. How can he prepare for an unknown disaster?

At that moment the cup bearer remembers someone who could accurately interpreted his dreams, Joseph who is still in prison. Joseph is scrubbed up and reclothed so he is fit to stand before Pharaoh.

Pharaoh says to Joseph, *"I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it."* (41:15) But Joseph makes it clear, *"I cannot do it, but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires."* (41:16) This is all God's doing in giving the dream and its meaning. *Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, "The dreams of Pharaoh are one and the same. **God** has revealed to Pharaoh what **he** is about to do.* (41:25)

Joseph goes on to say, *"The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by **God**, and **God** will do it soon."* (41:32) God's fingerprints are all over what is happening. Joseph's God shows that he is greater than the Egyptian gods. God will send the seven years of plenty, then seven years of dire famine.

Joseph explains, *"The abundance in the land will not be remembered, because the famine that follows it will be so severe."* (41:31) It is just as the thin cows and thin grain had swallowed the fat.

Joseph not only interprets the dream but gives wise advice as the how to meet this situation. *"Appoint a discerning and wise man to oversee the collection of food in the good years and distribute it in the bad years."*

Pharaoh can see that Joseph has been given wisdom by God. *"Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God?"* Pharaoh has to admit that Joseph's God is at work.³⁹ *Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you."*⁴⁰ *You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders.* (41:38-40)

Joseph is made second in charge of all Egypt. He is responsible for administering the plan he has proposed. 41:47-57 tells us that Joseph collected and stored up food in the seven good years and then distributed the food in the seven years of famine.

We have seen the difficulty of providing aid in the situation in Sulawesi after the earthquake and tsunami, but Joseph successfully provided for the people of Egypt for seven years. In fact the famine was very wide spread and people from other lands had to come to Egypt for aid. This is the link to the next part of the story, Joseph's family will need to come to him. God has placed Joseph in the right place for Egypt and for the family of Israel.

3. A roller coaster ride

On a roller coaster the train goes slowly up the hill and everything looks good and you feel comfortable and safe. But then it plunges down to the bottom. That's when it feels like it's going to crash and everyone screams.

Joseph's life has been a real roller coaster. He started off as his father's favourite, dreaming of the family all bowing down to him. Then he was sold into slavery, probably tied to camel and made to walk all the way to Egypt.

He was then sold at a slave market. But in Potiphar's house things went well. He was put in charge. God seems to be blessing him. But then he was falsely accused of rape by Potiphar's wife and put in prison.

In prison God is with him. Things went well there but he is still a prisoner. Imagine how his hopes must have risen when he meets Pharaoh's cup bearer. Here's a man who could get him freed but the cup bearer forgets him. He rots for two more years in the prison.

All this happens before finally he comes before Pharaoh, interprets his dreams and is made second in command of all Egypt.

We can see God's finger prints on all that is happening here but think of Joseph through all this time. He can't see where the events are leading. He has to suffer being sold by his own brothers, being sold as a slave, being falsely accused and then years in prison.

But God's plans are big. God's plan is for Joseph to save his family from famine. But it is much more than that. This is all part of God's plan to make Israel a great nation, to give them the land and to bring blessing to all nations. It all leads to eternal salvation being offered to everyone through Jesus.

But Joseph as he sits in prison doesn't know any of this. He doesn't know why he has to go through this suffering.

It's like that for us. Often we can't see God's purposes in what happens to us. Life might be a real roller coaster for us. But God's word assures us: *We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.* (Romans 8:28)

Sometimes it may be clear that God is blessing us as it was at times for Joseph but at other times we might wonder if God is there at all. Experience in life can be very confusing. At times we can't see God's finger prints anywhere. We need to trust God's word. He is at work for our good.

Romans 8 goes on, ³² *He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?* (8:32) God has demonstrated his good purposes by giving his own Son for us. If he's done that he will continue to work for our good.

Joseph knows that God is behind all that is happening. He says that God has given the dreams to reveal his plans and God will do what he has planned.

Then in naming his sons he shows that God has been at work in his life. *Joseph named his firstborn Manasseh and said, "It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household."* (41:51) Manasseh, meaning God has helped him forget the bad way he was treated by his brothers. He doesn't dwell on the past. He doesn't hold a grudge.

The second son he named Ephraim and said, "It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering." (41:52) Ephraim, meaning he is thankful for the blessings God has given him in Egypt. In spite of all he has gone through he is not resentful and he continues to trust God and be thankful.

It is easy for us when things go badly for us to act badly. We may just think of self and forget to care for others. We may lash out at those around us in words or actions. We may forget God or forget to pray and worship him. We may compromise in moral choices.

Here we have the example of Joseph as he suffered. But we have also the example of Jesus. He also was humiliated, falsely accused, rejected and made to suffer. *When they hurled their insults at Jesus, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.* (1 Peter 2:23)

Even when we can't see God's finger prints in our lives, when we can't understand what he is doing we can still trust him.